

On Oct 7, 2005, at 12:19 PM, John Lowther wrote:

On Thursday, October 6, 2005, at 05:02 PM, Chuck Kleinhans wrote:

Somebody's done it: Rober Beebe's "Composition in Red and Yellow"

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/rogerbb/films/redyellow.html>

curiously, i saw this film this past week. it and several other by Roger Beebe. of this film i had mixed reaction, pegged by something mumbled by a person sitting near me; "how is this not a mcdonald's commercial?" Roger seemed to feel that the film was funny and that somehow it was his revenge on Micky D's but i found nothing much to support that. i also didnt get any humor effect from it. perhaps there was something to the soundtrack which made the criticality of this work obvious, but i didnt catch that either.

if anyone here has seen the film & could comment i would be curious to hear it.

kind regards
john lowther

On Oct 7, 2005, at 12:40 PM, Allyson K. wrote:

I love Composition in Red and Yellow. I think the way Roger edited the film was meant mock McDonalds and I think it really comes across that way to the audience well at least the audience in Washington, DC. You should see it again.

On Oct 7, 2005, at 1:16 PM, Jesse McLean wrote:

i had mixed reaction, pegged by something mumbled by a person sitting near me;
"how is this not a mcdonald's commercial?"

Let's not always buy into the idea that any publicity is good publicity. Hopefully we are not so successfully captivated by MacDonald's ads that any mention/glimpse of their products or logos becomes an endorsement. Besides, how are you supposed to criticize or comment on a huge corporation's practices (a corporation that prides itself on it's appearance and recognizability) without being able to make visual reference to it? Seems a bit challenging...

-Jesse

On Oct 7, 2005, at 3:03 PM, Cari Machet wrote:

oh what's her name - oh yes - LESLIE THORNTON
made an "archival footage" film
-don't remember the name-
of african and asian people of color

and didn't in any way appropriate it
just "edited" it all 2gether
slapped on some tunes
i think the people were exploited all the more
all the while in discussion at a film showing
she is spouting gabaldigook about nothing of
consequence re: HER use
in all her white guy glory - lincoln center et al
she in no way could see
the periphery
of what she was doing

it is just in the same frame of all the images of bush
- negative or not -
i don't think it helps anything
and just adheres in the end to a propaganda -
most unfortunate

there are ways to appropriate images in
criticism and be very clear about it
and not re-in-act the initial crime
but it is a little like doing heroin
without becoming a heroin addict
not that easy

c

On Oct 7, 2005, at 3:33 PM, Nathan Andersen wrote:

I wonder about both reactions (included below) to this film. Does it have to be either critique or endorsement? What about taking an unavoidable feature of the American (and global) landscape and calling attention to its "variety in sameness" without judgment? Some viewers will find that comforting, others disgusting. Or: an ironically condensed account of any and every roadtrip across the United States that plays with the conventions of the roadtrip genre as much as it playfully calls attention (in a kind of parody of Duchamp or Warhol) to formal properties of an ubiquitous set of symbols? I haven't given it much thought, but while I laughed when I saw the film I didn't take either mockery or endorsement to be the among the dominant functions of the work. Those would be, I think, secondary responses that betray more about the person watching it than about the work.

Nate Andersen

On Oct 7, 2005, at 4:09 PM, John Lowther wrote:

ok, 1st off -- i'm not trying to bash the film in any way, i saw it once and had a number of interruptions & distractions. also i liked other films by Roger in the program. one of which might provide a contrast somewhere below.

Allyson, you mention the audience getting it in DC. I think maybe the Atlanta audience didnt. I must be included in that. So to put it as briefly as possible; In what does the criticality of the film consist? (or what is a better question?)

Jesse, your points are well taken but I guess I had not intended to be generalized quite so much. It is not the simple presentation, or at least maybe it isn't, but more the audience mumbler's question; How is this not a McDonald's commercial? -- or as I put it to Allyson above, in what sense is this film critical of it's target? is it? is that relevant and if not why not?

But I am curious about the broader issue of being so "successfully captivated" by corporate images. Please forgive the non-film anecdote;

. . . some years ago i lived on the north side of town and there was a billboard for much of the 5 years i was there which was perpetually a marlboro cigarette ad, one cowboy, horse or sunset after another. eventually it seems that the client decided to quit using that billboard and the company that manages it sent out it workers to deface the image until some new client bought it. they shredded and tore and really went at the layers of marlboro and it was a beautiful thing, like a Schwitters collage -- but the disturbing aspect of it was that it continued very powerfully to signify marlboro. surely more people got the marlboro ad than any unintended schwitters allusion. . .

Cari, your example gets at the same sort of logic but redirected. But with a nifty twist it seems to me, the people appearing in this film you mention are at risk of being owned by their "film maker" -- whereas none of us assume that Roger Beebe owns MickyDs -- the thought even flitted thru my head that if this film were overtly critical one might have to take the legal scene into account. Would the burgermeisters sue? etc.

&... just as i was about to post this i see that Nathan has joined the fray and zeroed in on some of what i wondered above. Altho your message, if i may say so, presents itself as the one somehow unswayed by personal issues which might cloud your viewing -- but its equanimity is only guaranteed if, for instance, there was clearly no good reason to suppose that images carry a political charge of any kind or that notions of spectacle or hegemony might be a good ways of understanding the proliferation and use of images. i'm no cognitive scientist but from what i gather of Lakoff's recent political work and the notion (very filmic if unacknowledging of that) of "framing" suggest to me that one would have to do a great deal of careful work to counteract the unconscious overdetermination brought on by years of mcdonalds image consumption. that's what Cari isgetting at with the herpoin comment i think. (none of this is an endorsement of Lakoff's political program)

i had hoped to say something about another or Mr. Beebe's films that might bear on this but i have to get moving, more films tonight!!

thanks for all the replies..

John

On Oct 7, 2005, at 4:32 PM, konrad wrote:

Irony is certainly one dominant mode in current art circles. But i wonder if this 'nonjudgemental irony' is a mask for being stuck between saying nothing and saying too much, because once you start to actually say something, you get shot down or you put your foot in your mouth, or you reveal your ignorance, bad

spelling habits, etc

Of course you can't do nothing, so saying it again with irony is more like CYA, so you don't get caught in a banal critique or more subtly (what cari is saying) become self-co-opted by the very celebrity/power you're trying to leverage ironically.

If by the logic of 'beauty is in the eyes of the beholder,' the work gets valorized for inspiring a complex and opposing reactions, it's also possible that the work is fatally ambiguous, or the audience simply undecided.

But really, if something as ubiquitous and monotonous as The Golden Arches doesn't CRY OUT to be judged and critiqued, what does? The movie is in super-8, as i recall, and its 'home movie' look hints at a kind of David and Goliath scale to the unavoidable encounters with the restaurants. It was a critique to my eyes, but what does that say about me? I think it just says that's the best way i could see to make the film work. That is to say, that if i think of it as a non-judgmental landscape of restaurants, open to interpretation by all like a deadpan simulacra Warhol Brillo-Box, i don't find it as interesting.

But the trick would be to get McDonalds to underwrite the DVD journal it gets put in. When you can get away with that and not be co-opted well then maybe the Society of the Spectacle is done for.

konrad

^Z

On Oct 7, 2005, at 4:41 PM, Jen Proctor-Valdez wrote:

At the risk of stating the obvious, and of oversimplifying Roger's film:

Although I find "Composition in Red and Yellow" playful and lighthearted, it seems to me that the humor--and critique--resides in the sarcastic and ironic use of "Hands Across America" as a soundtrack set against images of the overwhelmingly ubiquitous presence of McDonald's in the U.S. It's patriotism inextricably bound up in corporate dominance, played out as a road movie, the supposed genre of youthful rebellion. I would have a hard time imagining an audience misinterpreting the irony there--especially an audience that knowingly attends experimental or avant-garde or Roger Beebe screenings--but perhaps I am naive.

I don't find the film to necessarily hold a deeply profound or far-reaching critique, but I think the humor of the piece acknowledges that.

There's my highly simplified take.

Jen Proctor
Iowa City Microcinema

On Oct 7, 2005, at 5:27 PM, John Lowther wrote:

Dressed, ready and biding my time until the Gordon Matta-Clark films tonight....
I'll tap one more missive...

Part of my problem is that the soundtrack really didnt make any impression on me. This is partly i think due to where i was during that film (within the gallery space) and also that i had been fielding calls for directions to the gallery and so kept getting interrupted.

But now having called up the lyrics of the song (appended here) i can see how, had i known them or heard them this all might have done something more for me;

Hands Across America
by: **Voices Of America**
1986

Hands Across America
Hands Across the land I love
United we fall
United we stand
Hands Across America
Mother and Father
Daughter and Son
Learn to live as one
I can not stop thinking again and again
How the heart of a stranger
Beats the same as a friend
Learn to love each other
See these people over there?
They are my brother and sister
When they laugh I laugh
When they cry I cry
When they need I'll be there by their side
We are the river of hope
That runs through the valley of fear
And there is a lady whose smile shines upon us
Saying all is welcome here.
Learn to love each other
See the man over there?
He's my brother
When he laughs I laugh
When he cries I cry
When he needs me
I'll be right there, right by his side
The kiss never felt so sincere
Full of countless dreams
This earth, it never smelt so sweet
Cradles a song in its great heartbeat
Learn to love each other
See the man over there?
Hes my brother
When he laughs I laugh
When he cries I cry
When he needs me.
I'll be right there by his side

*

i think that something about irony is being missed in this discussion -- that it always cuts both ways. and of course the danger of it (flipside of its effectiveness) is that it's cutting 2nd edge will be missed. this might be case in point, for me at least, or perhaps for the largely unmoved audience that i saw it with, if that 2nd edge is not itself so much sharp as implied, "sharpen-able" so to speak.

one of the other risks of irony is that it functions as a stand-in for critique not made thereby licensing the conjoining or juxtaposition of things "as if" critiqued.

anyway, i am not championing the idea that film must be critical or overt or anything like that. just thinking about about some of the perils of irony in aesthetic discussion.

the other film shown, i forget the name now -- but it was like this; a group of film maker all made a version. one after another. modeled on the child's game called variously "whisper down the lane" "gossip" and "telephone". here each film is made to a textual description of the previously made film. a pretty fun idea i thought. but then the film that the original description is based on is a tommy hilfiger cologne commercial. this set up the tension for me as i loath that company's oh so straight white brand of jingoistic imagery. so then i wondered as the project unfolded for us, how will this be reconceived? will the flag cease being the u.s. flag? will the boy girl dynamics shift to boy boy or girl girl? will the surrounds be depicted as something contrary to the wholesome americana of the original? my favorite? naturally the one whispered furthestest down the lane...

here it seems that one could again, perhaps following Nathan's lead, suggest that no criticism or detouring of these materials is necessary and that the focus is simply in seeing how the successive textual mediation interacts with each film maker's sensibilities. but this feels sort of wishy washy to me. to choose a television commercial as a subject to refigure as art film seems to require something more. why not start with found footage? or homemovies? the key in hand scene from hitchcock's Notorius? it seems to me that every choice has political consequences and effects -- but maybe i'm just, um, projecting? ;)

anyway, there is more to say but hopefully this will do...

best
john

On Oct 7, 2005, at 6:04 PM, Allyson K. wrote:

When I watch this film I see corporate consumer landscapes. McDonalds is a perfect example. I like what Jennifer had to say about the music. I had forgotten about the great soundtrack. Like, I said you should see consider seeing it again without all of the distractions.

Roger you want to chime in about what your film really means? LOL!

Allyson

On Oct 8, 2005, at 9:15 AM, Roger Beebe wrote:

A few years ago, upon the occasion of watching the FOX reality special "Man vs. Beast" (which featured such gems as Carl Lewis offering, in describing the keys to a man vs. giraffe foot race, that "the giraffe has to realize that it's in a race"), a friend of mine who had written a satiric novel about a Las Vegas spectacular featuring a bear battling a shark in a tank of shallow water, said that he thought

perhaps satire was dead since we could no longer imagine anything more ridiculous than what the world is offering up unironically. I said that I thought maybe the vocation of the satirist was just to POINT at these things now. And I guess that's basically what I was trying to do with "Composition in Red & Yellow."

Was my relationship to the McDonald's restaurants that I was photographing fundamentally ironic? Yeah, I guess so. More so, at least, than in my other recent films where I've been more interested in just documenting the shape of the world (as Nate described his experience of "Composition..."). And that irony is communicated here not just by the act of pointing, but also by the music (as Jen suggested) and by the fact that it's on super 8 (as Konrad pointed out--and I usually project it from a super 8 print when I tour with it to emphasize this) and also in the recontextualization of a McD's commercial from your TV set to a microcinema, art gallery, punk club, etc. It might be worth noting too that the song itself isn't "inherently" ironic--it certainly wasn't received that way when Hands Across America was trying to raise money for to fight hunger & homelessness in 1986. And for those who still love their Kenny Loggins--the song is sung by a Kenny Loggins imitator--and who don't find the patriotic doggerel offensive (aesthetically or otherwise) and who don't find cloying the modulation at the end where the chorus of kids' voices enters, well, then the song still probably doesn't play ironically. And so I agree with Konrad that we're more or less disposed to read any of the potentially ironic features as ironic depending on where we're situated when we encounter this film. (My ex-girlfriend's father, a businessman who sells blue jeans to department stores, said I should try to sell the film to McDonald's as a commercial. That was the first time I realized that the irony could be completely missed.)

For what it's worth, I don't think it's an incredibly deep or insightful film--it's just a fun trifle that I can use to warm up crowds or to cleanse the palate between longer, more substantial films. And on tour for the last month, toward the end I did tire of it a little bit & started swapping it out of the program for other things.

BUT, even given my own mixed feelings about the film at this point, I still think there's something important in reclaiming the commercial signifiers that have become part of the landscape that we live in. If McDonald's (as with many other places I've tried to shoot) wants such absolute control over their corporate image that they won't even allow anyone else to fire off a single frame of their sign (as happened when I was shooting "The Strip Mall Trilogy"), then I feel like we have an even greater imperative to take as many pictures of them as possible. Do we have to make "Composition in Red & Yellow"? No. In fact, I hope we can do a lot more than that. But I do feel like we (or at least I) have an obligation to do something.

So, yeah, that's what I have to say. It was an interesting discussion to read though, and I'm glad I wasn't able to chime in until now, because I've been really interested to hear what everyone else was thinking. And, of course, in no way do I think that my comments here are "definitive"--they're just an expression of my own relationship to this film.

My two cents then.
Roger

p.s. John, the other video you were referring to is "One Nation under Tommy."
And I agree with you that it's a more interesting project than "Composition in Red

& Yellow" although in general it's less of a knee-slapper as well, at least per my experience at previous public screenings.

On Oct 9, 2005, at 2:59 PM, benj gerdes wrote:

I saw Chain and posted a little bit a few weeks ago. I would say more about it but don't want to be called a glib anti-capitalist again. I think as a model, 7 years in the making, shot/edited/produced by one person, it's a pretty singular work at this point. For something that brings in footage from around the globe, it also differs from a lot of other experimental narratives that foreground their economic constraints--impressive color timing and sound mix, etc and no handheld camera fetish. Seeing stolen film footage of privately controlled social spaces--malls, hotels,etc--is striking in and of itself. The impossibility of distinguishing between documentary and fictional sequences is part of a process of accumulation over time--the real becoming surreal and at the same time more frightening--that succeeds without being heavy-handed or obvious. The flattening of distance between these sites is depicted pretty strongly, but the VOs ground this through two subjective accounts of the experiences of these spaces. It's accessible and simple formally, but I think effective and unmistakably critical in its depiction of these spaces without giving the audience too much room to get off on being better than, say, someone shopping at a strip mall in the mid-west.

I guess the question about roger's film (which I haven't seen) is the degree to which people seem to want to hold his "authorial intention" of irony accountable for being underpronounced in some situations--I'm not sure this is fair. If we say irony often reads somewhat ambivalently and is almost always culturally or context specific, it's obvious audiences at the D.C. underground film festival will read it differently than a less self-selected audience or an audience outside of the US that views McDonald's in a different light (not to over-generalize, but I did read an account of a recent McDonald's opening in rural Mexico--the brightest young students were given the day off to attend). How would "Mouse Heaven" play to the audience at a disney collectors' convention? Asking for obvious and unmistakeable legibility is either a model for a consumer-based film or a really-didactic one.